

Nancy Johnson



Fifth District, Connecticut

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Johnson Announces New Medicare Drug Benefit Sign-Up Starts Today

Waterbury Senior to Save \$4,000 a Year

WATERBURY, CT – Congresswoman Nancy Johnson today joined seniors, state officials and health care providers at Waterbury's Leever Cancer Center to announce the savings available through the new Medicare prescription drug benefit. Enrollment for the new Medicare drug benefit begins today, and the coverage takes effect January 1, 2006.

"Today seniors can start signing up for the new, voluntary Medicare drug benefit," Johnson said. "I expect many of the estimated 100,000 seniors in the Fifth District to benefit from the Medicare drug coverage. One such senior in Waterbury expects to save \$4,000 per year. Now all seniors can fill their prescriptions without having to choose between paying for groceries or their medicines. I encourage every senior in Connecticut who will save through the Medicare drug coverage to take full advantage of it."

The new prescription drug benefit is voluntary and available to the 540,000 Connecticut seniors and people with disabilities who qualify for Medicare. In some cases, the Medicare drug benefit will save seniors hundreds, even thousands, of dollars per year.

Mrs. Shirley Rabinowitz is one such senior who will save money with the Medicare plan. Mrs. Rabinowitz, 79, has lived in Waterbury for 53 years. She is a retired grants manager for the Western Area Agency on Aging (AoA), where she served area seniors for 24 years.

Mrs. Rabinowitz takes 17 different prescription drugs to treat a variety of illnesses, including Nexium for heartburn and Plavix for a heart condition. She also takes medications to treat diabetes. Her out-of-pocket drug costs are huge. **Under the Medicare drug plan Mrs. Rabinowitz intends to sign up for, she will save \$4,000 each year.**

"This program is wonderful," Mrs. Rabinowitz said. "I stand to save \$4,000 through the Medicare prescription drug program."

Like many seniors, Mrs. Rabinowitz had questions about the new drug benefits. After contacting her local Agency on Aging and working with counselor Dawn Macary for 30 minutes, Mrs. Rabinowitz found the right plan for her.

Medicare enrollment starts today/2

“We’re finding the Medicare drug benefit is going to save people money,” Macary said.

Many of the drug plans available in Connecticut have premiums costing less than \$30 per month, and one even costs only \$7.32 per month. While some plans have a \$250 deductible, most do not have any deductible at all, which means the drug coverage kicks in on the very first prescription a senior fills. Almost all offer mail order delivery, and some offer extra coverage for those with drug costs over \$2,250 each year. Seniors should take advantage of the many resources available to get help finding the plan that will save them money on the prescription drugs they need.

For those enrolled in the state ConnPACE prescription assistance program, the state is teaming up with Medicare to provide these benefits. By teaming up, seniors on ConnPACE will receive even better coverage and will likely save even more money than they do now.

“For ConnPACE recipients, the co-pays will not exceed the current \$16.25 co-pay,” said Department of Social Services Deputy Commissioner for Administration Mike Starkowski. “In many cases, they will pay less than the current ConnPACE co-payment.”

Seniors with low incomes will qualify for extra help, and they will spend no more than \$5 for each prescription they fill. Seniors who may qualify for this extra coverage are being contacted now.

There are many resources for seniors and their families who have questions about the Medicare drug coverage. Below are some helpful tips from the Connecticut Department of Social Services about signing up for the Medicare drug benefit.

What information do you need before you sign-up?

- Your Medicare claim number (this information is contained on your Medicare card).
- The drugs you take, including the dosage and the number per month (this information is contained on the pill bottle or medication package).

How can you get help signing up?

- Call the state’s CHOICES toll-free hotline at 1-800-994-9422. CHOICES stands for Connecticut Health Insurance Assistance, Outreach, Information and Referral, Counseling and Eligibility Screening.
- Call a Medicare counselor toll-free at 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227).
- Talk to your doctor, your pharmacist, or counselors at your local senior center.

“There are many resources available to help you save money. You can call Medicare at 1-800-MEDICARE, or call the state’s CHOICES program at 1-800-994-9422. Talk to your doctor, your pharmacist, and your family. The Medicare drug benefit is there to help, and you can start to sign up for it now,” Johnson said.

While the enrollment period begins today, Johnson said seniors should review all their options and have all their questions answered before signing up. The open enrollment period lasts until May 15, 2006.

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